

# A Brief History of the Reagen Site Since its Discovery

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## Introduction

When William A. Ritchie first presented the Reagen site (VT-FR-3) to the archaeological community in the pages of *American Antiquity* in 1953, it immediately achieved fame as one of only a handful of Paleoindian sites ever to be discovered in northeastern North America (Funk 1978; Ritchie 1953, 1957; Wormington 1957; see also Robinson and Crock 2008). Reagen served as an early testament to the antiquity of human occupations in the Northeast, and was for many years used to characterize Northeastern Paleoindian archaeological sites generally (e.g., Mason 1962; Funk 1978; Ritchie 1957, 1965; Wormington 1957).

Yet, despite its early and continued attention, the documentation of the Reagen site has until recently remained very poor (see Robinson 2008, 2009; Robinson and Crock 2008). Like many sites that were brought to scholarly attention through the work of avocational collectors, the modern history of the Reagen site and its assemblage is convoluted and not altogether known. As part of the author's graduate work, an attempt was made to address these shortcomings. The results of a reanalysis of the entire extant artifact assemblage and the interpretations and contextualization derived from it have been presented elsewhere (Robinson 2008, 2009). What follows in this paper is a partially reconstructed modern history of the Reagen site, using correspondence, eye-witness accounts, researchers' notes and other supplementary evidence. This recent aggregation of evidence has enabled the author to construct a skeletal but coherent narrative of the site prior to and subsequent to Ritchie's involvement.

Although this paper is a narrative of the history of the Reagen site and does not really address the analysis of the assemblage itself, the reconstruction

is both illuminating and important as a testament to the many entities that at one time or another controlled a portion of the collection or visited the site. More importantly, due to the modern alterations at the Reagen site, this summary is crucial for even a vague understanding of the original site context, the artifact collection chronology, conditions and other salient details; most of which were unfortunately never formally recorded.

## Environmental Setting

The Reagen site is located in East Highgate, Vermont, approximately 9.5 km south of the Canadian border (Ritchie 1953). It is situated on the southern flank of an unnamed hill at an elevation of approximately 76 meters above mean sea level (amsl). The crest of the hill is approximately 152 meters amsl (Figures 1 and 2). The unnamed hill upon which the Reagen site lies is approximately 500 meters west of Rice Hill, elev. 250 meters (Jacobs 1950; see Ritchie 1953). These two hills are part of a series of roughly north/south trending ridges and hills named the Airfield escarpment. The escarpment constitutes the precise local boundary between the Champlain Lowland on the west and upland areas on the east (Dennis 1964). The eastern upland area is characterized by prominent hills and undulating terrain that steadily gain in elevation until reaching the foothills of the northern Green Mountains, 19.2 km away.

The view from the Reagen site is expansive and extraordinary. To the south, one looks out over the Missisquoi River valley and the highest peaks of the Green Mountains in the distance. To the west, one can observe the Missisquoi River as it flows west toward Lake Champlain. The view to the east is partially obscured by Rice Hill, and to the north by the crest of the hill.

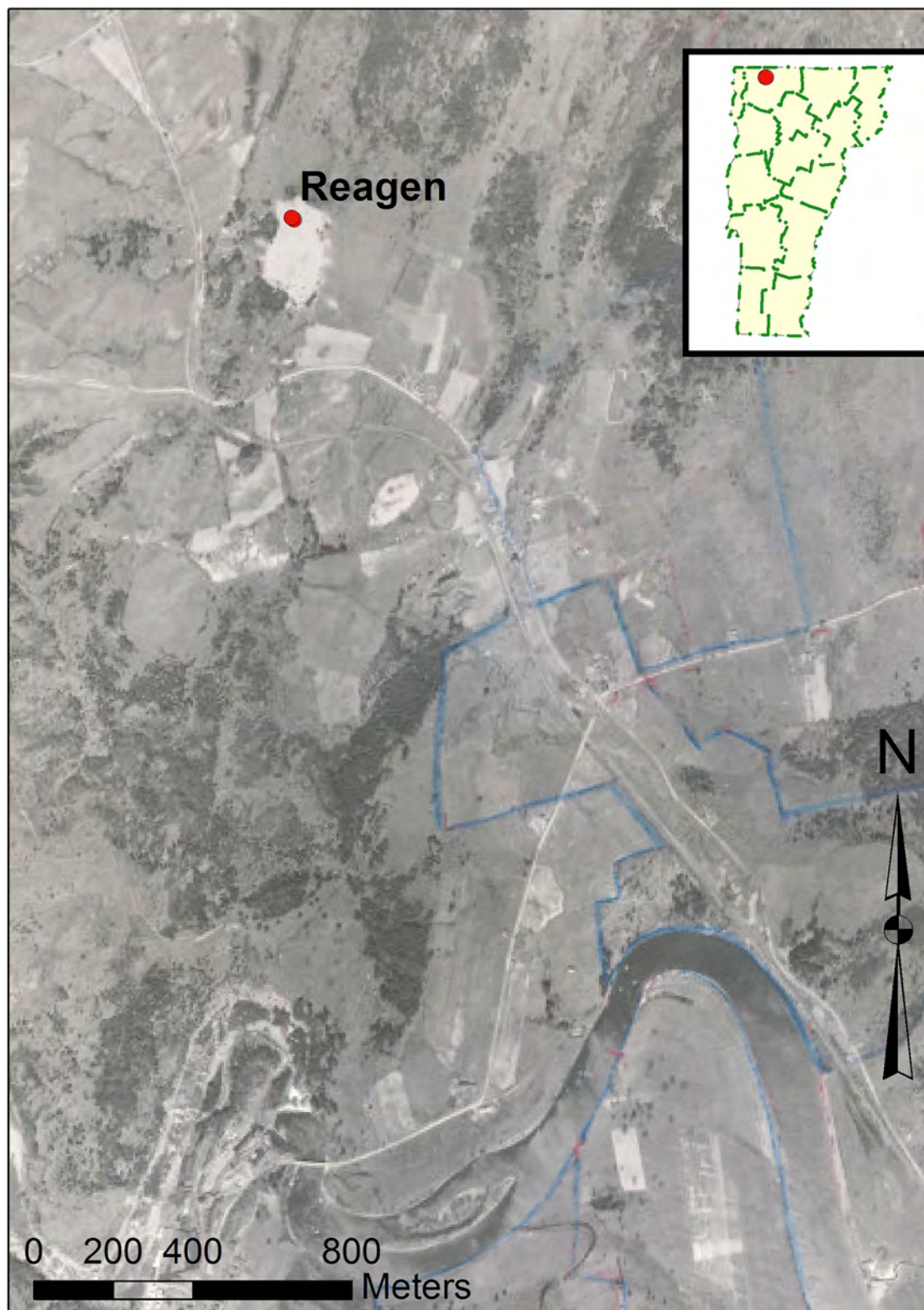


Figure 1. Low altitude orthophotograph of the Reagen site area in 1941. The completely denuded hillside is apparent as a white patch in the photograph. Note also the general lack of tree cover in this portion of the Mississquoi River valley (source: 1941 NRCS low altitude orthophotograph).

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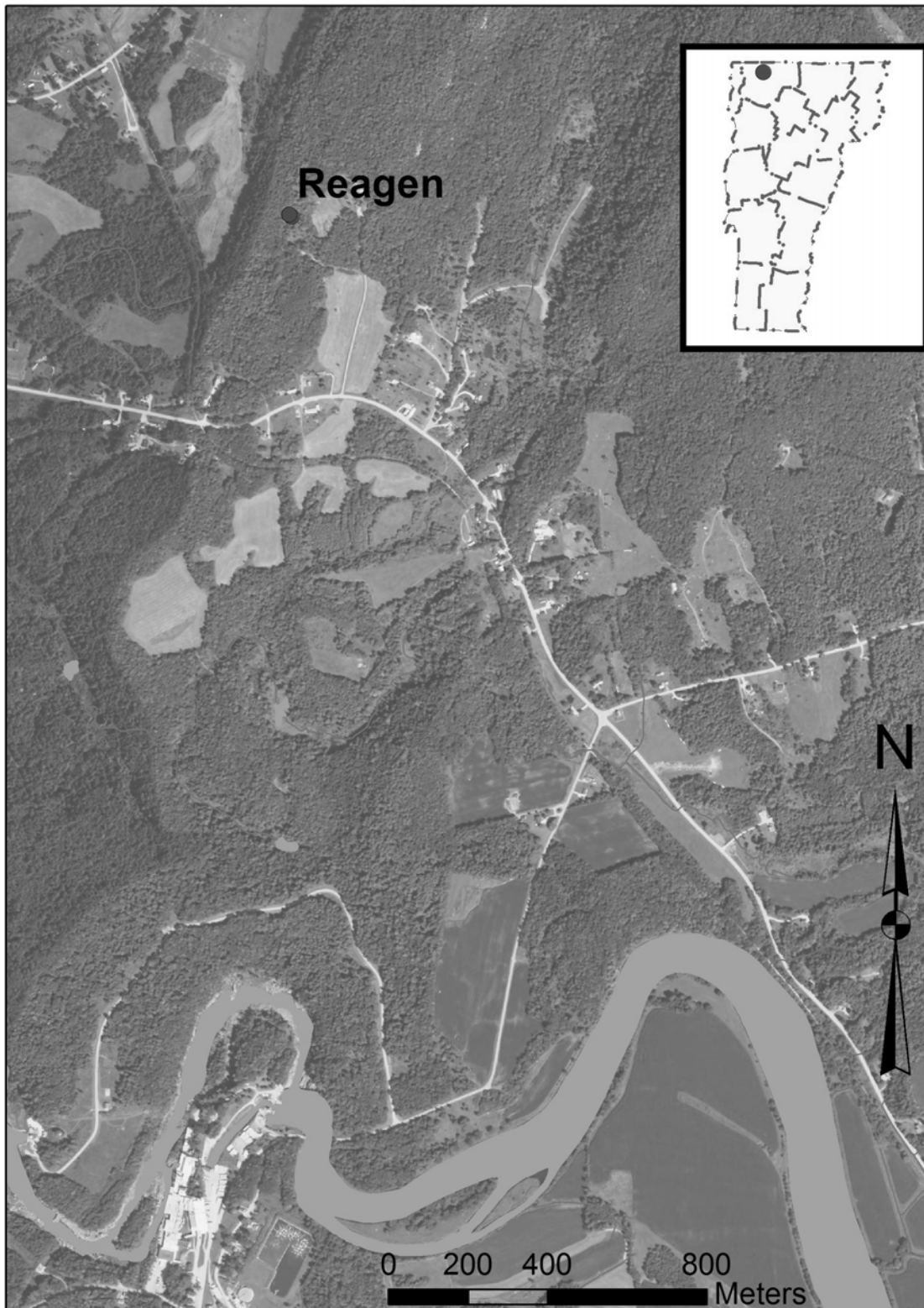


Figure 2. The Reagen site area today (circa 2008). Note the renewed tree cover on the majority of the Reagen site area and in this portion of the Mississippi River Valley (source: VCGI.org).

Currently, the lower portion of the south hillside is kept as a lawn by the landowner. Red pine plantings have stabilized the former loose sand on most of the presumed Reagen site area. Prior to mid-twentieth century stabilization efforts, however, the entire area remained denuded from nineteenth century clear-cutting of the tree cover (see Figure 1). Aeolian processes acting on the loose Champlain Sea sand deposits caused the formation of shifting dunes across the site. The wind and dune formation processes also uncovered the artifacts that were collected by Fisher, Ross, and Ritchie.

### The Discovery of the Reagen Site

In his 1953 article in *American Antiquity*, Ritchie stated that the Reagen site had been found by William A. Ross and Benjamin Fisher, “some 20 or 30 years ago,” (Ritchie 1953:249). After reviewing correspondence between Fisher, Ross, and Ritchie after the time of Ritchie’s initial visit to Reagen, however, it now seems that Ritchie’s summary statement was a clear attempt to gloss over the disparate accounts of the site’s discovery and discoverer(s).

Although there is no direct evidence, it appears that it was correspondence with Ross that originally sparked Ritchie’s interest in the Reagen site. His acquaintance with Ross likely came about through Ritchie’s connections to the Champlain Valley Archaeological Society (CVAS), with whose excavations in Vermont and New York he was quite familiar (Ritchie 1949; see Hudec 1971). The CVAS disbanded in 1942, partially due to the outbreak of World War II, but more specifically due to sustained acrimony between many of the senior members (Loring 1980). Ross left the group bitterly in 1939 with accusations that the New York members of the CVAS were usurping the sites he had discovered as their own. He wrote in a letter dated October 14, 1939 to Mr. S. H. P. Pell, the director of the Ticonderoga Museum at that time and a board member of the CVAS:

As one should expect from a man of such small

character as Slocum’s [another board member and benefactor to the CVAS], he managed to slip from under a disagreeable situation and leave it to someone else to handle for him.... It seems that no one mentioned the fact that I was the one that showed the society the sites, without which knowledge, the society would be non-existent today. Whether this was done intentionally or not, I do not know. When Dr. [Henry] Perkins asked why there had not been work done in New York, why was he not told that the society had no sites there to do, instead of putting him off saying that it was better to finish the one that was now being worked. However, I will take care of that in my letter to the press at the first signing of the society’s activity...(Ross to Pell, October 14, 1939, Fleming Museum archives).

While it is not necessary to point out Ross’ acerbic tone, the letter is illustrative in that it attests to the covetousness and ownership he (and many others) felt toward archaeological sites in Vermont during those years. In any case, it was Ross who first led Ritchie to the Reagen site in 1950 (Ritchie 1953), and it is perhaps telling that Benjamin Fisher was not part of the investigative crew.

Benjamin Fisher, on the other hand, appears never to have been directly involved with the activities of the CVAS. He may have been a member at some point, but he seems to have been careful to keep out of the fray. In a reply to H. B. Eldred regarding Fisher’s collections written on June 15, 1936, he wrote:

It is gratifying to know that the Museum is at last interested in keeping the relics of our early people in the state. There have been many collections lost because of the lack of interest. I understand that the museum was offered a share in the [CVAS] project at Orwell.

My own collection came largely from Addison and Franklin Counties. The material from the latter county is similar to that of the Tux

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Collection, as much of it was made in the company of Mr. Truax. Much of it is not suitable for exhibition purposes, as I am more interested in studying sites and cultures than in making a collection. As you probably know, there is considerable rivalry among collectors of this material, and the small collections are being eyed from several directions. It is a delicate and difficult matter to pick them up. I could not name any owners who could be approached without the value going to a prohibitive point. I understand from Mr. W. A. Ross that Pell of Fort Ticonderoga is to make a survey of the Champlain Valley for Indian material (Fisher to Eldred, June 15, 1936, Fleming Museum archives).

It is notable that in this letter excerpt, it appears that Fisher knew only of the CVAS activities through a conversation with Ross and not through direct interaction with the Society. Indeed, nearly a year later, in 1937, Henry Perkins [George Perkin's son, director of the Fleming Museum, and board member of the CVAS] was still making inquiries to acquaintances regarding a man named Fisher and his collections (Perkins to Manley, March 4, 1937, Fleming Museum archives). It appears likely, therefore, that Fisher and Ross initially met each other because of their shared residence in St. Albans and not through the CVAS. This letter also attests that Fisher was well aware of the rivalries emerging regarding Native American artifact collectors and the sites to which they claimed ownership. Finally, the letter establishes that Fisher and Truax were partners in collecting. While tangential, it helps explain Fisher's interest in Paleoindian sites (see Robinson and Crock [2008] for details regarding the Fisher-Truax relationship and their discovery of the Fairfax Sandblows site).

Sometime after Ritchie's visit to the Reagen site and his decision to analyze the collection and publish his research, Ritchie acquired what he believed to be the entirety of both Ross' and Fisher's portions of the Reagen site assemblage from their respective owners. Nevertheless, in the

earliest letters contained in Ritchie's New York State Museum (NYSM) files, it is clear that Ritchie initially consulted only Ross regarding the salient details of the discovery and history of collecting at Reagen. The letters indicate that he considered Ross the authority on the site and its principal collector. From all indications, Ross seems to have done little to dissuade Ritchie of the notion. In response to the question of the date of the site's discovery, Ross replied to Ritchie that, "I first found the Reagen site while hunting late in November of 1922 and found the first Folsom like point lying on the surface of the frozen sand. Having shortly before seen the article and picture in the *Literary Digest* now discontinued I recognized the type" (Ross to Ritchie, undated 1952, NYSM archives). Although unquestioned at the time, this statement would soon become problematic for Ritchie.

After the preparation of the first draft of his *American Antiquity* article, Ritchie sent a copy to both Ross and Fisher for their comments. Ross wrote back to Ritchie that, "There is nothing that I would change neither is there anything I could add," (Ross to Ritchie, undated 1952, NYSM archives). Fisher, however, composed a somewhat lengthy reply.

He politely outlined some of what he viewed as factual errors in the text. In addition to giving a fairly detailed explanation of the remains of quarrying activities he observed at the site, he corrected Ritchie's (and Ross') assertion that the site was first discovered in 1922 and that Ross had discovered it (the possibility that the Reagen site was a quarry location is currently being researched by the author and Dr. Adrian Burke, University of Montreal). Fisher wrote that he first visited the site in 1927, and that he didn't invite Ross to the site until November 28, 1934 (Fisher to Ritchie, April 14, 1952, NYSM archives). He even included in his letter to Ritchie a page of his notes from that day in an attempt at confirmation.

Moreover, Fisher made no claim that he was the first person to recognize the Reagen site's significance. Instead, he wrote to Ritchie that he heard of the site from a native of East Highgate,



who in turn had learned of the site through the investigations of the “Old Professor.” Fisher wrote to Ritchie that:

This may have been Dr. Perkins of the University of Vermont, who at that time covered nearly every square foot of the Champlain Valley investigating many things. The native told me that the professor told him that the site was probably a lookout. He also stated that the [lithic] material found there was not found elsewhere in Vermont (Fisher to Ritchie, April 14, 1952, NYSM archives).

The assumption that Professor George H. Perkins was the “Old Professor” of which the “native” spoke is probably accurate. Dr. Perkins spent much of his time investigating archaeological sites and geology within the northern Champlain Valley; especially along the Mississquoi River as evidenced by his numerous publications about or referencing the Swanton Cemetery and other investigations in the area (Moorehead, 1922; Perkins 1873, 1879, 1881, 1900, 1909, 1911, 1912; see Bassett 1976, Haviland and Basa 1974). Unfortunately, if any specimens were collected from the Reagen locality by the senior Perkins, they are not specifically recorded as such in Perkins’ collections at the Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont. Indeed, one is fortunate to find the county within which an artifact was originally recovered indicated for any given specimen (Haviland and Basa 1974). In any case, select artifacts from the extant Reagen assemblage collected by Fisher are labeled as “Lookout,” which suggests that Fisher likely believed the story he was told by the “native.”

Ross, on the other hand, claimed that he found the first fluted point at the Reagen site in 1922 and recognized it from a *Literary Digest* article about Paleoindian sites (see Roberts 1936). The date of the first of only two *Literary Digest* articles dealing with Paleoindians of which the author is aware, however, was actually published in their June 9, 1934 issue; over a decade after the year Ross

claimed to have first visited the site. The second article clarified and expanded upon the first (Roberts 1936). Moreover, the issue date correlates reasonably well to Fisher’s account of Ross’ first visit to the site. An even more demonstrable refutation of Ross’ claim is the fact that the first unequivocal site of Paleoindian antiquity wasn’t discovered until 1927 at Folsom, New Mexico, and was not popularly reported until Barnum Brown’s article in the *New York Times* on September 23, 1928 (Boldurian and Cotter 1999:7-9).

In contrast to Ross’ unsubstantiated claims about the site’s discovery, there is a fair amount of evidence to support Fisher’s version of events. Fisher also mentions in his April 14, 1952 letter to Ritchie that, having recognized similar points in an article by Barnum Brown on the Folsom site, he sent, “a collection (*sic*) [or possibly, “a collection”] from the Reagen site to the American Museum of Natural History. Dr. Gregory and Dr. Nelson examined it and reported that there was no difference between this material and that found in central N.Y. state,” (Fisher to Ritchie, April 14, 1952, NYSM archives).

In an attempt to confirm the authenticity of this claim, the author contacted the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). While the anthropology department had no archived artifacts or correspondence related to Fisher or Vermont Paleoindian sites, a kindly referral to the Paleontology department resulted in ten pages of letters involving Fisher, Barnum Brown, and other researchers at the AMNH in the late 1920s.

Most of the resulting correspondence has been summarized by the author in another *Journal of Vermont Archaeology* paper (Robinson and Crock 2008). It concerned another Paleoindian site informally referred to as the Fairfax Sandblows site (VT-FR-64) in the regional literature. What is notable for the purposes of this paper is that the last archived letter from Fisher refers not to the Fairfax Sandblows site, but to another site about which Fisher had recently been made aware. In that letter, he wrote to Barnum Brown:

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Twenty four miles north of Fairfax, at about the same elevation (420 ft.) [as the Fairfax Sandblows site] is a deposit of sand, on an outcropping of slate.... On the west side of the hill, where the rocks once met the sea, is a site where rechipping was done. Surface looking and digging netted several points and parts of points. One perfect head is similar in outline to the Fairfax points, tho [sic] it is not fluted. Another butt resembles the same culture. Specimens were found together with bits of char coal in a restratified layer of sand. Some specimens are greatly weathered, and some show little evidence of it. Two cultures may be represented, but more likely the weathered ones lay on the surface for many years, for very little change occurs in chert except by the action of air and light (Fisher to Brown, July 7, 1930).

He sent along several specimens with the letter, asking for evaluations and advice regarding them. Brown received the box a few days later. In the last letter contained in the archives at the AMNH, Brown replied to Fisher:

Your letter of July 7th and the package of artifacts came yesterday. I have looked the artifacts over, but personally feel that an expert opinion should be passed on them by Doctor Nelson, who is away in Europe for the summer. He will be there at least two months and I presume it will be sometime after his return before he can make any statement. So I trust they may be left with us that long for an authoritative opinion. From your description, I think you have a good argument for considerable antiquity for the one group. Certainly if it can be proven by topography and geology that the river is 130 feet lower than the present stream course at the time this camp site was active, I feel quite sure that the Department of Anthropology will give due consideration and, I hope, investigate your find. I am sending a copy of your letter to Doctor Wissler and someone in that Department will also acknowl-

edge receipt of the specimens and return them when examined. I shall probably be in the field late this summer (Brown to Fisher, July 11, 1930, AMNH archives).

The "Doctor Nelson" to which Brown refers was likely Nels Christian Nelson, one of the country's foremost archaeologists during those years and longtime curator at the AMNH (Mason 1966). As Fisher's first letter to Ritchie makes clear, Dr. Nelson did eventually return the artifacts with a reply. Although a copy of that letter has not been identified, it is at least apparent that Dr. Nelson thought that the points were Paleoindian in age and that they were identical to finds in central New York State. It is unclear which New York sites Nelson referenced.

Despite these encouragements, several years past, but no formal archaeological investigations at Reagen were conducted by any of the professionals he contacted. Fisher appears to have been quite persistent, however. He also wrote in his first letter to Ritchie that, "Later Dr. Howard became interested and visited the site with me. He was impressed by its resemblance to Folsom, but was cautious in giving any definite conclusions, though he mentioned the possibility of the connection in a paper, with which you are undoubtedly familiar." [Ritchie wrote "look up" in the margin of the letter, which suggests he was not aware of the article Fisher referenced] (Fisher to Ritchie, April 5, 1952, NYSM archives).

The "Dr. Howard" to which Fisher refers is none other than Edgar B. Howard; the principal excavator of Blackwater Draw, the site in New Mexico where the Clovis culture was first identified (Boldurian and Cotter 1999). Howard apparently visited the site after Fisher contacted him and sent along specimens for his edification. Indications of this are found in a vague reference made by Howard in the publication to which Fisher referred. It is a long-form article published in the *Museum Journal* in 1935, entitled, "Evidence of Early Man in North America," which likely represents the first continent-wide synthesis of Paleoindian (or "Early Man") research. He wrote:

Recently there has come into my hands the base of a point, which in cross-section is biconcave and is almost exactly similar to the base of one I found at Folsom last summer. It comes from a sand dune area in Vermont, associated with other small leaf-shaped blades, and flake knives and scrapers. Without further study of these I should not like to class them with the Folsom type, but merely mention the circumstances (Howard 1935:115, 119).

The reference that Howard lists for these artifacts is, "B. W. Fisher, St. Albans, Vermont," (Howard 1935:120). This reference subsequently was used for other syntheses throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s (e.g. Fischel 1939), but what would become the Reagen site was apparently never pursued further by Howard or others.

The lack of additional interest in Reagen was likely due to the deluge of purported Paleoindian discoveries conveyed to professionals following the *Literary Digest* article that Ross referenced. Frank H.H. Roberts wrote in a 1936 issue of the *American Anthropologist*, dedicated solely to the state of Paleoindian research at that time, that:

Investigations at the site that yielded the first definite complex of stone implements attributable to so-called Folsom Man came as the culmination to an interesting series of events which began in May, 1934. In that month Mr. D. I. Bushnell, Jr., collaborator in anthropology at the U.S. National Museum, discovered in two collections gathered from various parts of Virginia examples of the type of projectile point which has been called Folsom. Announcement of the fact was made by the Smithsonian Institution in one of its press releases. The article, with photographs of the specimens, was printed in slightly revised form in the *Literary Digest* for June 9th, 1934. The notice loosed a veritable flood of letters, and queries poured in from collectors all over the country. There was some confusion about what constituted a Folsom point, and the editors of the *Digest* felt

that a second article, one describing its characteristics in detail, was advisable (Roberts 1936:337).

Thus, even though Fisher seems to have been remarkably prescient regarding the Paleoindian antiquity of the Reagen and Fairfax Sandblows sites, it is likely that following the press deluge in the mid-1930s, he became one among many trying to vie for scholarly attention. For instance, it was one of these letters that brought the famous Lindenmeier site to the attention of the Smithsonian (Roberts 1936; see Wilmsen and Roberts 1978). Unfortunately, it would not be until 1950, when Ritchie finally came to Reagen, that this scholarly attention was at least partially realized.

Despite these discouragements, even as late as 1938, Fisher was still trying to popularize "Folsom Man" locally. In a letter from Henry Perkins to Fisher (who apparently finally achieved contact with him), Perkins wrote that "... the information in your little article is very well worth while and that I have used it in my talk. I find myself quite interested in the Folsom culture and in the controversy which is waging at the present time in regard to the probable date of its origin and continuance," (H. Perkins to Fisher, August 12, 1938, Fleming Museum archives).

While the article to which Perkins refers has not been located by the author, Perkins' notes for a lantern lecture he periodically gave do contain an additional card, attributed to Fisher, which discusses Folsom Man. The talk was entitled, "The Archaeology of the Champlain Valley," which suggests that he made reference to local Paleoindian sites.

### Reagen and Ritchie

The years between the mid-1930s and Ritchie's visit to Reagen in 1950 are almost completely undocumented, as far as the author is aware. From Fisher's letters to Brown and Ritchie, it seems that the deforestation of the Reagen site, which enabled the site to be collected by Fisher and Ross, and perhaps Perkins before them, also eventually enabled dunes



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to cover over most of the artifact deposits and the ledges at the site (Robinson and Crock 2008). Even as early as the late 1920s, Fisher relayed to Brown that dune action had begun to obscure portions of the site. It also seems apparent that after Fisher introduced Ross to the site, Ross returned repeatedly. Based upon a series of photographic plates in the NYSM archives and a corresponding notation system, many of the 179 artifacts that were submitted to Ritchie for analysis can be assigned to one or another owner. Specifically, 60 artifacts out of the 179 (discounting lithic debitage) can be attributed to Ross' collection, and 91 can be attributed to Fisher's collection. Therefore, it seems that despite the likelihood that Fisher was collecting on the site for the better part of a decade before Ross ever arrived there, Ross still managed to amass a sizable collection from the site by 1950 (see Robinson 2009 for additional details about the Reagen assemblage).

The author also learned from the director of the Highgate Historical Society, Charles Nye, that a systematic replanting effort was conducted in 1946 to stabilize the soil on the hill where the Reagen site is situated. Apparently the community was concerned about the amount of blowing sand on the hill and they conscripted the Boy Scouts to plant red pine in a systematic way over the dunes. Mr. Nye was one of those Boy Scouts.

Ritchie wrote that his first visit to the Reagen site occurred in October 1950 (Ritchie 1953). Ross, Ritchie, and Donald Lenig comprised the investigative party. At the time of his visit, Ritchie noted the new pine plantings, but stated that at that time their small stature had failed to arrest much of the aeolian action, which had covered nearly all of what it had once exposed (Ritchie 1953:250). Except for the small tree plantings, Ritchie's characterization of the site conditions upon his arrival is probably illustrative of the conditions throughout much of the earlier part of the 20th century. Unfortunately, no site visit notes or photographs are contained within the NYSM archives. It is clear that it was Ritchie who named the site "Reagen," however, after the owner of the property at that time.

After Ritchie's (1953) *American Antiquity*

article appeared in print and Reagen became well-known, there are very scant references to a number of archaeologists visiting it over the years. It is unclear, however, if Ritchie ever returned to the Reagen site. From his cordial, but somewhat exasperated letters to Ross and Fisher, he may perhaps have become disgruntled regarding the disparate accounts of the site. In any case, except for his 1957 publication and references to Reagen in *The Archaeology of New York State* (1965, 1969), Ritchie never explicitly turned his attention to Reagen again.

### Reagen after Ritchie

The stand of red pine that was planted over the Reagen dunes in 1946 eventually grew and covered over the Reagen site. Trees were subsequently logged from a smaller area as seen from an older orthophotograph, but the site remained primarily forested until the recent past. The respective portions of the assemblage were eventually returned to Fisher and Ross, although exactly when this occurred is not known. Much later, when Ross was in his eighties, he claimed that Ritchie never returned all of the Reagen collection to him (personal communication, Louise Basa to James Petersen 1999). Apart from four artifacts collected by Ritchie during his visit to the site, however, there is no other Reagen material currently curated at the NYSM. The history of the Reagen assemblage following Ritchie's involvement is even less clear, and a large portion of the assemblage Ritchie examined is now missing. At some point in the 1960s, Fisher passed away. It appears that a portion of his artifact collection was donated to the University of Vermont's Fleming Museum and a portion was given over to the Fort Ticonderoga museum, perhaps facilitated by Ross.

Ross had sometime in the 1940s "loaned" a large portion of his collection to the Fort Ticonderoga Museum for display purposes with the condition that it could be withdrawn at any time (*Enterprise and Vermonter*; October 21, 1971). This loan lasted roughly thirty years, until 1971, when

Ross went to Fort Ticonderoga and attempted to retrieve the entire collection for permanent display at the Bixby Library in Vergennes (*Enterprise and Vermonter*; October 21, 1971). Ross was apparently driven to return the artifacts to Vermont in order that they remain available to Vermonters for study because of a reemerged animosity toward the New York side of Lake Champlain and certain people from the days of the CVAS, anger that more of the collection was not being displayed, and most notably, rumor of the deaccession and sale of artifacts, including Ross', from the museum. While there is no proof that the Fort Ticonderoga Museum sold portions of Ross' collection, it does appear that much of it was missing by the time he went to retrieve it in 1971. In a hyperbolic article about the retrieval of the collection in a small Vergennes newspaper, it states that:

They [Ross and friends] were disappointed in the total quantity of pieces recovered from Ticonderoga, as only 233 out of an expected 3500 pieces were found. About half of these pieces were on display in the New York museum, the others being tucked away from view. A search is still being conducted for some of the missing pieces, plus a complimentary collection of Mr. Benjamin Fisher, who was Ross's partner in excavating many local sites ... in the 1920's and 30's (*Enterprise and Vermonter*; October 21, 1971).

As far as the author is aware, the additional artifacts were never located or returned. The portion of the Reagen collection that was retrieved, in addition to the rest of Ross' collection and a portion of Ben Fisher's collection, were set up in a special room at the Bixby Library. The room is still largely intact today, with much of Ross' collection still in the positions in which he placed them in 1971.

Curiously, after the author was able to assign ownership to the extant portions of the assemblage that Ritchie examined, except for a single artifact, none of them were collected by Ross. In other words, for nearly every artifact for which an owner

can be assigned, that owner was Fisher. As stated previously, there are a large number of artifacts for which no owner can be attributed, likely because one or another owner collected the materials after Ritchie's analysis. As for what happened to the portion of the Ross collection that Ritchie examined, or how Ross acquired such a large portion of the Fisher collection to display at the Bixby, the author has been unable to find any explanation.

Meanwhile, as stated previously, another portion of the Reagen assemblage collected by Fisher (corresponding approximately to Plates 17 and 18 in *Traces of Early Man in the Northeast* [Ritchie 1957]), was apparently donated with some of the Fisher collection to the Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont after his death. At some point, however, the Reagen artifacts went missing from the Fleming. They were subsequently re-donated by a Mr. Peter Rose in 1984. The circumstances of his acquisition and subsequent donation to the Fleming are not now known.

A large portion of the Reagen assemblage at the Bixby Library was subsequently borrowed by Robert Funk in 1989 for an exhibition at the NYSM. Although it appears the artifacts were intended to be returned after the conclusion of the exhibition, they remained at the NYSM until 2002, when James Petersen retrieved them on behalf of Dick Adams, then the curator of the Bixby Library museum room.

Although not much is known about his collecting activities, a Mr. Anthony Peace also regularly collected at the Reagen site. He was younger than Ross and Fisher, however, and only began going to the site much later. It is perhaps illustrative that his collection contains primarily flakes, and only one tool can be definitively attributed to the site from his collection. This lends additional credence to Fisher's claims that the majority of the site was covered over by continual dune action by the time Ritchie arrived there in 1950. Peace's collection, including the Reagen material, was donated to the State of Vermont upon his death, and it is currently located at the Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center in South Burlington.

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After inquiring about the Reagen site to a number of elder Vermont collectors, it is clear that it was a regular stop for several of them until the red pine stand grew to sufficient size, or until the landowner ceased permitting them access to the site. One recently deceased collector, Langdon Smith, reported collecting flakes at the site on a number of occasions, but never any tools, as far as he could remember. He said that others had recovered the same. He could no longer account for the whereabouts of the flakes, however.

### **Subsurface Investigations at the Reagen Site**

From Ross' correspondence and from an interview conducted with him just prior to his death, it is clear that Ross not only surface collected at Reagen, but actively engaged in some episodes of subsurface collecting as well. Fisher apparently did the same. Unfortunately, no documentation for this activity is preserved, and it is unclear where these "diggings" occurred and what was obtained from them. Barring Ross' and Fisher's investigations, there was only one episode of documented subsurface excavation, as far as the author is aware. It was carried out by the newly assigned State Archeologist, Giovanna Peebles, on November 10-11, 1978, with a group primarily affiliated with UMASS Amherst, including Peter Thomas, Cindy Cook, Stephen Loring, Bill Bayreuther, Pamela Bumstead, George Butts, and the local collector Anthony Peace (see Front Cover photo).

Seven test pits were excavated at places where Peace remembered Ross having particular luck with collecting, and also in areas where they felt intact soil stratigraphy might be preserved. Peebles' field notes suggest that depressed sand filled pits were observed adjacent to a bedrock exposure, and may have been evidence of Ross' excavations. In total, eight test pits were excavated. Unfortunately, the comprehensive map of both the excavations and the general topography of the site as it existed in 1978 is now missing. Copies of the field notes and test pit forms, in addition to the artifacts recovered from most of the test pits are preserved by the State and

these were analyzed by the author.

In general, the test pits revealed pronounced aeolian action toward the upper portions of the profile, but intact underlying stratigraphy. The majority of the test pits contained artifacts within them, though no formal tools. One test pit, excavated near to a bedrock outcrop, had the highest number of flakes and apparently exhibited intact stratigraphy as well, until truncated by bedrock.

Dr. Stephen Loring (now at the Smithsonian Institution) provided the author with a series of photographs from the 1978 excavations. His photographs are the only visual record of the Reagen site prior to 2007, as far as the author is aware. After an analysis of the photographs, it would be difficult to overstate the differences in topography that have occurred over the last thirty years at Reagen. Bedrock outcrops that were clearly visible in 1978 are now buried by earthmoving activities or natural processes. The latter process seems to have occurred despite the dominant red pine tree cover over much of the site. The trees in 1978 were obviously much smaller. A clear view of the valley to the west of the site is discernable in Loring's photographs, but is now totally blocked by tall red pines.

### **Summary**

To summarize the history of Reagen, it appears that Fisher recognized the antiquity and significance of Reagen as early as 1929 and attempted to have scholars come and study it. Yet, despite repeated overtures to the AMNH, and incidental correspondence with some of the most important names in early archaeology, such as Barnum Brown, Clark Wissler, Nels Christian Nelson, William King Gregory, and Edgar B. Howard, no sustained scholarly interest in the Reagen site emerged until Ritchie's visit in 1950. Nevertheless, it appears that the "Fairfax Sandblows" site (Robinson and Crock 2008) and the Reagen site appear to be the earliest Paleoindian sites in New England reported to professional archaeologists by at least 20 years.

With regard to Fisher and Ross, research appears to have borne out Fisher's recounting of the

site's discovery, while Ross' version is vague and now appears to be largely a fabrication. The veracity of Ross' claims is important with regard to other aspects of the Reagen site as well, most notably the origin of the steatite artifacts (see Robinson 2008, 2009).

Following Ritchie's involvement, the site became regionally quite famous. Ross and Fisher likely continued collecting on the site and they appear to have been followed by a number of professional archaeologists and avocational collectors, though only vague references and word-of-mouth attest to most of these visits and/or collecting forays. The Reagen artifact assemblage as Ritchie examined it became widely scattered after his involvement as well and a significant portion appears to have been lost or stolen sometime between the late 1950s and the late 1990s. Regarding sub-surface excavations at the site, the only documented excavation prior to the author's very brief exploration was conducted in 1978 under the direction of Giovanna Peebles. Only eight test pits were excavated, and while artifact densities were fairly low, debitage was recovered from nearly every test pit. Moreover, the stratigraphy they documented in many of their test pits suggested that there was a significant to pronounced aeolian overburden underlain by an old (likely 19th century), weathered plowzone, underlain by intact subsoil. During the author's brief sub-surface reconnaissance at the site, a nearly identical sequence was identified, but without any pronounced aeolian overburden. This suggests, as Peebles earlier posited, that the wind was prominently blowing sand off of the lower area and onto the higher dune areas, or from southwest to northeast.

The Reagen site itself was planted in red pine in 1946, but the tree cover only arrested the aeolian action across the site much later. In the interim, sand dunes covered over much of what the wind once exposed, including much of the bedrock on the site. Beginning in the early 1990s, sand was removed from the primary dune area by the landowner for use in the construction of his house foundation.

Nevertheless, much of the site appears to remain preserved, at least from modern disturbance, under the stand of red pine.

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